

March 10, 2008

Senator Thomas P. Gaffney, Co-Chairman
Representative Andrew M. Fleischmann, Co-Chairman
Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3100
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Senator Gaffney, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the
Education Committee:

As Mayor of the Town of Stratford, I am here regarding House Bill No. 5026, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Regarding Education; and Raised Bill No. 614, An Act Concerning the Recommendations by the Legislative Commissioners for Technical Revisions to Education Statutes:

This being a short legislative session, it is probably unreasonable to expect significant improvements to the Education Cost Sharing formula or any major restructuring of Connecticut's tax system, which currently places far too great a reliance on local property taxes for the support of our public schools.

However, as mayor of Stratford, I would be remiss if I failed to urge this Committee and all other members of the General Assembly to increase the FY09 ECS allocation beyond the currently budgeted 4.4% increase.

In separate testimony today, the Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding, of which both the Town of Stratford and its Board of Education are members, has provided data that show that overall, municipalities and their schools have suffered a 24% decrease in the value of ECS per pupil entitlements over the last 12 years. Stratford, relatively speaking, has improved its lot; in that our per pupil allocation actually grew by 30% over the last dozen years. However, that came about due to significant changes in our growing student population. Over that time, our minority student population doubled, now comprising more than 40% of all students, and the number of students from low-income families increased by 40%. In a mid-sized district of some 7500 students housed in just 12 buildings, those demographic changes represent dramatic change. Nevertheless, over the last dozen years, Stratford has suffered a cumulative ECS cap loss of more than \$54 million, with its annual entitlement capped every year.

I should also like to point out that the median household income in Stratford is below the state median and ranks 123rd out of the state's 169 municipalities. In 2006, 51% of local tax revenues went to support our schools, and our equalized



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mill rate is 14th highest in the state. As the state's 18th largest municipality, Stratford's fiscal struggles to meet children's learning needs and ensure that its schools remain the pride of our community, I believe, merit your concern and commitment to system school finance reform.

Although our school funding woes may not be quite as severe as those in the large urban centers — at least not yet — the taxpayers, parents, and students of Stratford, the state's 17th largest municipality, and of many other mid-sized and smaller towns call upon this Committee to champion the kinds of funding system changes that will strengthen our communities, improve our schools, provide meaningful property tax relief, and adequately and equitably secure our children's future. After all, these children are our future workforce, future taxpayers, and future leaders.

Last year this Committee heard public testimony around the state concerning the ECS and related school funding issues. Whether in Hartford, Ledyard, Bridgeport (where I was one of those who testified), Stamford, or Ansonia, you heard poignant testimony and impassioned pleas from elected municipal officials, educators, parents, senior citizens, and other local taxpayers, all beseeching the state to revamp the ECS formula to enable every community to afford high-quality schools and calling upon the state to assume a substantially greater share of education costs. And subsequently, this legislature and the Executive Branch did indeed make some initial progress in that direction. But there is much "catching up" to be done, and a 4.4% increase in the FY09 ECS entitlement hardly moves things forward at all. Instead, the state's share of education costs appears to be falling, not rising.

I urge you to forego any new education mandates this year unless the state is willing to fully pay for it. I also urge you to rule out any proposal for property tax caps, as hindering the ability of municipalities to raise taxes to support the local schools could be catastrophic in light of the state's continued inadequate support.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J.R.M.", is written over the typed name.

James R. Miron
Mayor